



Tom Barrett
Mayor, City of Milwaukee

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BARRETT UNVEILS PLAN TO PUT MORE MILWAUKEEANS TO WORK
Mayor enlists Don Sykes to head up City's first Office of Workforce Development

MILWAUKEE – Mayor Tom Barrett last week during his State of the City address unveiled his plan to create a Mayor's Office of Workforce Development to provide leadership on the issue of high unemployment and needed job training in Milwaukee.

At the same time, Barrett announced his intention to seek a designation by the Governor for Milwaukee to serve as the lead agency for workforce, a designation currently held by Milwaukee County. Barrett followed up on his intention with a letter to Governor Doyle on February 12, 2007.

Barrett has consistently stated that a healthy economy for Milwaukee will be made up of trained, skilled workers who can fill the needs of local employers and provide incentives for businesses to relocate or expand here.

Barrett highlights successes with his Summer Youth employment initiative which in 2006 put 1,000 high school juniors and seniors to work in Milwaukee and the progress on the Job Corps Center which opens in 2009, but has said there is more work to be done immediately.

"Historically, when it comes to workforce development the City of Milwaukee has not been aggressive," said Mayor Barrett. "Those times are gone. Numerous reports, studies, and media accounts have documented the same short-comings of our current system. In the world of global competition, city government can no longer ignore what needs to be done."

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Last year, thanks to a grant from the state, Barrett recruited back to Milwaukee a national leader in workforce and economic development, Donald Sykes. Along with an advisory council of experts and stakeholders in workforce development Don has produced a report of recommendations and actions to implement.

The report includes recommendations to implement an approach that is employer-driven, responsive, coordinated and well-funded and highlights the need to establish in the Mayor's office an Office of Workforce Development to provide leadership and collaborative regional efforts.

The report also points to the need for a Mayor's Advisory Group, comprised of business and other community leaders, to provide overall strategic direction to workforce development efforts; and a City of Milwaukee Workforce Investment Board to receive existing state and federal funds and monitor service delivery.

"22 out of the top 25 cities operate their workforce initiatives in conjunction with the Mayor's office," Barrett continued. "The reason is plain and simple – leadership. The designation of the City of Milwaukee as the lead agency for workforce development does not change my desire for workforce to remain a regional priority. I will continue to work, just as I have always done as a founding member of the Regional Workforce Alliance, with the workforce agencies of the surrounding counties."

Mayor Barrett has asked Donald Sykes to serve as the first Director, a position he has accepted. The plan will be financed by existing federal resources the city is eligible to receive for workforce development. A jumpstart for the effort was provided by the single largest private gift to a city in Wisconsin for workforce development -- \$500,000 from the Helen Bader Foundation. Barrett stated this investment acknowledges the need to change our current system and will help leverage additional funds.

Barrett continued, "Milwaukee is the economic engine for the entire State of Wisconsin. On the issue of workforce, we need to implement changes to our local and regional strategy. And the City must take the lead. We cannot afford to fail."

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A copy of the plan is available on the Mayor's website at:
www.city.milwaukee.gov/mayor